Chapter 1 - Mononobe Mitsuki

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ブリュンヒルデ・ヴァルキリーズ

銃皇無尽のファフニール外伝

I



ツカサ

Part 1

A white trail was traced across the navy-blue ocean while a ship advanced along its way.
On this large ship that had never taken passengers before, there was no boisterous hustle and bustle nor the slightest rocking.
Because it was a military ship. Without decorations like those on passenger ships, the ship's gray-painted body was a bit intimidating.
The ship had no recreation facilities at all. To be honest, the multi-day journey was very boring.
However... Soon after...
With a strong sea breeze blowing, I stared in the direction where the ship was heading.
It was coming into sight presently. *His* location—the place where Nii-san was.
"—Midgard is protected by the Midgardsormr defense system. Although it is currently submerged out of sight, it will emerge from the water if anything happens, fulfilling its function as a physical line of defense."
Standing on the side was a member of Midgard's staff. The woman—Mica Stuart-san—was engaged in all sorts of explanations but I was paying no attention.
My mind was occupied with thoughts about Nii-san... Mononobe Yuu.
"To enter Midgard, one must pass through Bifrost, a predefined aerial and naval route. From here onwards, any deviations would cause one to be deemed an intruder by Midgardsormor and targeted for elimination."
"Eh, sure, oh no... Sorry, that came out wrong. S-So I see?"
I frantically changed my casual answer. Due to rarely having interactions with elders in my life so far, I was still unused to using polite forms in my speech.
I must pay attention to my language from now on, because I was going to be living with complete strangers at where I was heading for the first time.
The only exception would be Nii-san.
Taken into custody by NIFL, Nii-san should have started a life in Midgard.
I squinted to look for him. Next, a hazy outline of an island appeared on the horizon.
"Oh!"
I could not help but exclaim and point with my finger.

"So you see it... Indeed, that island is Midgard. The self-governed educational institution created for Ds and existing for Ds."

Looking at where I pointed, Mica-san explained.

Finally... I can finally see you again... Nii-san!

"Leave everything to me."

Nii-san's voice echoed in my ears. Engraved deeply in my mind, impossible to forget, those were the words Nii-san left behind when we parted.

A month earlier at Nanato City—our home, the town that stood along "Blue" Hekatonkheir's route of advance—had been on course for destruction in a dragon disaster.

However, just as Nii-san said, he took care of everything by himself.

Obliterating the "Undead" that my transmutation attacks had no effect on, Nii-san then turned in himself to NIFL which had become aware of a D's existence.

Thanks to that, Nanato City survived despite getting trampled and my identity as a D was not exposed.

Soon after, the evacuated residents returned to the town and resumed their daily lives as before.

However, this was not what I desired.

I had desperately guarded the town because it was the place where Nii-san and I were able to become "family." But now, my most precious Nii-san was no longer by my side.

Hence, I followed him. Nii-san might end up angry, but in spite of that, I still wish to meet him... I did not have the patience to wait until after the age of twenty when I would naturally lose my powers as a D.

...I did not want Nii-san to be snatched away by other girls.

To this date, all discovered Ds were female. In that case, Nii-san would be living in a place filled only with girls.

Attracted by other girls, he might forget our engagement promise.

Nii-san... Perhaps his heart had already strayed!?

With feelings of unease and anxiety, I waited for the ship to moor at the pier.

What I still did not know at the time was how optimistic these fears of mine were.

Part 2

"—My name is Shinomiya Haruka. I am Midgard Academy's student council president and captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad."
After the ship reached the pier, a girl dressed in a primarily monochrome uniform greeted me.
Her age was approximately seventeen or eighteen. Judging from her name, she should be Japanese like me. Her prim and proper face exuded an air of solemn dignity with her gorgeous long black hair tied in ponytail.
Wow... So pretty.
I could not help but stare in amazement, forgetting to answer her. Realizing that, Mica-san responded on my behalf.
"She is Mononobe Mitsuki, thirteen, a D discovered in Japan. We will hold a full-school assembly to introduce her to the students tomorrow."
"Will she be assigned to Brynhildr Class?"
Haruka-san asked in a lively voice and Mica-san replied.
"Yes, that is the plan. May I leave the rest to you?"
"Yes, no problem. I'll take her to the dormitories first and provide the essential explanations."
After Haruka-san replied, she turned around to face me.
"Mononobe Mitsuki—I am also a student of Brynhildr Class. However, having completed all the mandatory courses, I am now in the position of instructing others. We probably won't have many opportunities to study together, but regardless, it is a pleasure to meet you."
Haruka-san extended her pale and beautiful hand.
"T-The pleasure is all mine!"
Now was no time to be staring at Haruka-san in mesmerization. I replied frantically and shook Haruka-san's hand in turn.
"Very well."
Haruka-san nodded and smiled. Despite her beautiful and mature appearance, her smile had some child-like qualities.
Thanks to this smile, my nervousness subsided somewhat, allowing me to recall what I must inquire about no matter what.
"U-Umm, have you seen Nii-san!?"
Although I knew this was quite sudden, I still asked Haruka-san.
"Nii-san?"
Faced with Haruka-san's confusion, I continued:

"He was sent to Midgard before me! His name is Mononobe Yuu! Could you tell me which homeroom he has been assigned to!?"
I held Haruka-san's hand tightly while explaining to her but she became even more puzzled.
"Could you slow down a little? Since you're calling him Nii-san, that would mean he is male? Only girls have been discovered with Type Dragon powers. No male has ever been sent to Midgard."
"Huh...?"
Her answer left me stunned on the spot.
Haruka-san did not know about Nii-san? Nii-san was not here? No way—
"It can't be! Nii-san is a boy but he is a D! That's why it's impossible for Nii-san not to be at Midgard!"
"Even if you say that..."
With a troubled expression, Haruka-san looked at Mica-san.
"I am not lying... When I outed myself as a D to NIFL, I also told them about Nii-san. Nii-san and I had fought against 'Blue' Hekatonkheir..."
Hearing that, Mica-san's expression instantly changed in alarm.
"What—You were involved in the incident where Hekatonkheir vanished for a period of time?"
"Yes. Nii-san had fought Hekatonkheir for my sake. Also... The people at NIFL were not surprised even when I brought this up. I got the feeling that they knew about Nii-san. That's why..."
I had thought I would naturally get to see Nii-san once I was sent to Midgard.
Because my mind was occupied by the wish to see Nii-san as soon as possible, I had even forgotten to confirm with Mica-san.
"You don't seem to be lying."
Mica-san stared straight at me and murmured solemnly.
"But a male D... This is not something that can be believed so easily—"
Haruka-san had her hand over the corner of her mouth, shaking her head with doubt in her expression.
"...Indeed. There is nothing we can do about this. Let us report to Charlotte-sama so that she can make a decision."
"Report to the principal?"
Uneasily, I looked up at Mica-san and Haruka-san who were talking among themselves over my head.
What was the going on right now? And afterwards? I had no idea at all.
But one thing was for certain. I had come to a place where Nii-san was not present.
This filled my heart with a layer of gloom, forcing tears out of my eyes. I lowered my head, not wanting others to see me cry.
"—Don't worry."
Suddenly, someone patted me gently on the shoulder. I looked up to see Haruka-san looking at me with gentle eyes.

"We still cannot believe you completely because there is no evidence. However, we are still on your side in spite of that. We will surely do everything we can so that you don't have to cry."
Haruka-san spoke with powerful words. At the same time, Mica-san also spoke up.
"She is your fellow D and will not betray you. This is what Midgard is about."
"...Midgard."
I wiped my tears on my sleeve and repeated that word.
From this word of Midgard which had meant nothing to me previously except as a name, I felt reliability and warmth—

Part 3

A gigantic clock tower that could be seen even from the pier.
Mica-san and Haruka-san were taking me up to the clock tower's top floor.
"—Charlotte-sama, this is Mica."
"Come on in."
The voice coming from behind the heavy doors sounded as clear as a bell. I expected the principal to be someone fairly senior in age given her position, but she seemed to be even younger than I imagined.
"Excuse me."
Mica-san opened the door. Haruka-san and I followed her into the room.
The principal's office was very spacious but a bit dark due to the drawn curtains. Sitting in front of an office desk at the back of the room was a petite blonde.
Almost like a doll—No, like a fairy.
She looked similar to me in age. Don't tell me she's the principal?
"Wow, so this is today's new arrival? So cute!"
As soon as we made eye contact, her face seemed to glow radiantly as she stood up forcefully from her chair.
"U-Umm, my name is Mononobe Mitsuki. N-Nice to meet you—"
She seemed to be the principal after all. I greeted her nervously but before I finished, she ran over and grabbed my hands lightly.
"You look even cuter from up close! You'll surely be quite a beauty in two or three years' time! I, Charlotte B. Lord, guarantee it as Midgard's principal!"
"...Thank you, very much?"
She seemed to be praising me. I thanked her despite my doubts.
"Sigh..."
Next to me, Haruka-san sighed for some reason. Her face seemed to show annoyance.
"You must feel quite uneasy to have arrived in an unfamiliar place. Should I personally show you around Midgard? Every nook and cranny, without reservation... Fufu, fufufufu..."
"U-Umm..."
I sensed danger from the principal who was smiling eerily. Immediately, Mica-san used one hand to pick up the principal by her head.
"Charlotte-sama, please do not engage in sexual harassment. This task will be undertaken by Haruka-san who is in charge of providing guidance to students. There is no need for you to involve yourself."

"Owwwwwwww!? U-Unhand me, Mica! This isn't sexual harassment! I'm just showing care—"
"In that case, why the malevolence in your grin...? Oh well, whatever. I shall let you off this time."
Mica-san relaxed her hand and the principal fell on the floor on her bottom with a thud.
"Oooh... It's not everyday that I get to act lovey-dovey with a pure and innocent girl..."
The principal stood up while grumbling.
"You have shown your true colors, Charlotte-sama. Please fulfill your responsibilities as the principal and forget your inane desires. There is something important you must listen to next."
"Something important?"
"Yes, she will give you the details."
Saying that, Mica-san urged me with a motion of her gaze.
She wanted me to tell the principal about Nii-san, I suppose? Perhaps someone with an important position like the principal might know something.
"Mononobe Mitsuki, despite her *idiosyncrasies*... The principal is Midgard's chief administrator. She will surely be able to assist you."
Haruka-san patted me lightly on the back while she spoke.
"U-Umm, in truth—"
Encouraged by her, I mustered my courage and began to recount what had happened.
This time, I explained in detail while making things as clear and easy to understand as possible.
As my story progressed, the principal's expression grew solemn. Like gemstones, her green eyes glinted.
"—So the one who defeated and drove 'Blue' Hekatonkheir away was a male D. This is my first time hearing of it."
However, she did not seem to know about Nii-san either. My shoulders slumped in dejection.
"Really...?"
"I'm afraid so. Taking away your brother—Mononobe Yuu—NIFL has covered up the affair. Good grief... What annoying fellows."
However, what the principal said next caused me to look up forcefully.
"Eh...? You believe me?"
"Of course! I will never doubt words coming from an adorable maiden like you. Also, I can see desperate willpower in your eyes, almost bordering on insanity. You wish to meet your brother, don't you?"
"Yes!"
I instantly nodded deeply and answered.
"In that case, relax and leave it to me. Although my influence within NIFL might be insufficient... I will surely locate your brother."
"...Thank you!!"

The clouds of gloom shrouding my vision seemed to disperse all at once. I thanked the principal.

"However, even after confirming his existence beyond doubt, it would be very difficult to get hold of concrete evidence to force NIFL to admit to concealing information. Getting him back would probably be even harder. A great deal of time and political power will be essential. I hope you will prepare yourself accordingly."

The principal advised me with a serious look on her face. She told me about the harsh difficulties in the situation in addition to my groundless wishful thinking.

But to me, this might be a good thing.

Because the principal had just told me what I needed to do from now on.

"—Understood. I will... do my best. For the sake of meeting Nii-san again."

Since political power was essential, I shall acquire it.

Although obtaining it instantly was not possible, as long as I worked hard, I shall surely—

Part 4

The next day, after standing on the podium to introduce myself to all the students, I was taken to Brynhildr Class where I had been assigned.

"—No need to be so nervous. The homeroom currently consists of merely two other girls who had arrived in Midgard recently. You are all new, so you should be getting along soon."

Stopping in front of the classroom, Haruka-san said to me in my nervousness.

"Umm... So there are only three students belonging to Brynhildr Class, including you, Haruka-san...?"

I asked in surprise. Although I knew that Ds were not numerous, there were even fewer than I had imagined. Back in school in Japan, the classes I attended had over thirty students sitting in rows. The gap was giving me pause.

"Indeed, there were some senior students who 'graduated' not too long ago. I am about to graduate too. Brynhildr Class is currently in a transition phase."

Graduating... This probably referred to Ds losing their powers upon adulthood and leaving Midgard.

Each homeroom seemed to gather students of similar ages but needed to add newcomers when approaching "graduation."

The current Brynhildr Class was probably where new students were gathered.

"Then time to enter, Mononobe Mitsuki."

"Y-Yes!"

I nodded and Haruka-san opened the door, entering the classroom. Without faltering, I followed.

I glanced sideways to observe the classroom. There was only seating for nine students, in a 3x3 arrangement. Two girls were sitting in seats in the front row.

One of them was a girl with long blonde hair. Like Haruka-san, she projected an air of dignity, but compared to the Haruka-san, whose composure exuded vibes of kindness, this girl seemed a bit stern.

Then there was a short-haired girl with a book in her hand. Lost in the world of books huh? Lifting her head, she looked absent-mindedly at me.

"Although it has been said in the full-school assembly earlier, let us make introductions again. This is Mononobe Mitsuki, who will be a member of Brynhildr Class starting today."
Standing at the lectern, Haruka-san introduced me.
"I-I am Mononobe Mitsuki. From Japan. Nice to meet you all!"
I greeted them nervously and bowed my head deeply.
Clap clap clap. Hearing applause, I breathed a sigh of relief and looked up.
"Then you two should introduce yourselves in order too."
Once the applause ended, Haruka-san urged the two girls.
"—Understood."
The blonde girl stood up and gazed straight at me with her blue eyes.
"My name is Lisa Highwalker and I am British. Please feel free to ask me any time should anything you don't understand arise."
She tossed her sleek and golden hair and spoke her name with pride. I felt something akin to a distinct presence from her, pressuring me despite our similar ages.
"...Well, there were also many things we didn't understand when we first came to Midgard recently."
However, Lisa-san's face went red after the short-haired girl murmured.
"H-Hold on, Firill-san! Please refrain from unnecessary comments when I finally managed to present myself as a senior! Now you are making Mitsuki-san uneasy!"
"But... Trying too hard isn't good. Lisa, you'll fail if you put on airs like that."
"Gah..."
Turning even redder, Lisa-san sat back down in extreme embarrassment.
She seemed to be a more friendly person than first impressions implied.
Her stern vibes were apparently the result of her attempt to present herself as a reliable senior student.
Next, after Lisa sat down, the girl named Firill stood up.
"...Nice to meet you. I'm Firill Crest. No need to treat me as a senior, let's get along as classmates, okay?"
"Y-Yes! Pleased to meet you, Firill-san. Pleased to meet you too, Lisa-san, I am very happy for your gesture of care."
I bowed many times to Firill-san and Lisa-san.
"Mitsuki-san, there is no need for you to bow so many times. Excessive politeness would look like an inferiority complex, wouldn't it?"
"Oh sorry. I will pay attention..."
Reminded by Lisa, I frantically apologized.
"Aw, Lisa is acting like a senior again—"
"T-That's neither here nor there, okay!?"
Hearing Firill-san's comment, Lisa went red and turned her face away.
"So—Now that introductions are over, let's decide your seat. Mononobe Mitsuki, please pick any empty seat of your liking."
Had she been waiting for the conversation to finish? Haruka-san's sonorous voice interjected.

"Anywhere?"
"Indeed—Uh, I almost forgot to mention. The seat on the last row next to the window is mine, so excluding that one."
Saying that, Haruka-san gave me a push on the back.
Descending from the lectern, I felt Lisa-san and Firill-san's gazes while I looked at the empty seats.
"Umm, I-I choose this one."
I walked over to the last row and sat down on the seat closest to the corridor.
Sitting on the far corner diagonally from me, Firill looked at me, apparently offended.
"Eh— ...Why are you sitting so far away from me? Do you hate me?"
"No, that's not it! Everyone is sitting at a corner, so I..."
I frantically explained, trying to tell her I meant nothing by it.
"Why don't you sit over here? I'm very interested in Japanese manga and anime so I'd like to chat with you about them."
"U-Umm..."
She wanted me to go over. What should I do? While I was caught in a dilemma, Lisa intervened.
"If Mitsuki-san feels that seat is fine, so be it. Fixed seating only applies during lessons. Just get together after class if you want to chat with her."
"Ehhhh... But Lisa..."
Firill grumbled while pouting.
"It will be noisy for you during lessons if you sit near Firill-san, understood? That's why I moved away from that seat."
Shrugging, Lisa-san was looking at me with eyes saying "What will you do?"
"Umm, in that case, I will sit here..."
After some deliberation, I sat down again in the seat I had chosen.
"...Lisa, so bad."
"This is simply retribution for earlier."
After Firill-san grumbled unhappily, Lisa-san retorted nonchalantly.
Judging from the way they spoke to each other without reservation, Lisa-san and Firill-san seemed to be quite good friends.
No sense of distance, getting along naturally.
I guess I should chat with Firill-san about manga and anime first to build up our relationship.
Deciding that, I recalled the anime I had watched before and the manga kept in my old home—

Part 5

"Fictional... armament?"
—It was the first practical lesson. Changed into gym clothes, I was at an underground training site, tilting my head in puzzlement at the unfamiliar term.
"Indeed. As implied by its name, it is an fictional weapon formed using dark matter, pictured using your imagination. However, refrain from transmutation. All you are doing is shaping the dark matter to give it form."
Dressed in gym clothes, Lisa-san explained while generating dark matter in her right hand.
"Mumumu..."
Lisa-san closed her eyes and murmured while frowning. Next, the dark matter turned long and slender, taking on a spear-like shape.
"L-Like that. Keeping it in the form of dark matter is harder than imagined."
"Lisa-san, you are so amazing!"
Impressed, I exclaimed. On the side, Firill-san patted me on the shoulder.
"...Mitsuki, don't use Lisa as your role model. Look, the dark matter's form has not settled at all, has it? It will soon vanish."
Just as she pointed out, the spear-shaped fictional armament in Lisa-san's hand turned into bubbles and disappeared.
"I-I normally can do better!"
Looking at Lisa-san, who had gone red, Firill-san began to sigh.
"Sigh... Lisa is trying too hard again."
"I am not trying too hard..."
"By the way, we are supposed to doing warm-up exercises first. Haruka-san will be mad if you casually demonstrate poor models."
Saying that, Firill-san looked towards the control room. Inside the room behind glass, Haruka-san seemed to be saying something to Midgard's staff.
"Hmph... I could do better once I've decided on a name for my fictional armament..."
"A name?"
I looked questioningly at Lisa-san, who was murmuring in chagrin.
"Naming a fictional armament is necessary to give it a well-defined image. However, giving it the name of something that actually exists would end up restricting your imagination, possibly materializing it. Hence, it is customary to pick names from legendary weapons..."
"Lisa can't think of a name."

Firill-san interrupted Lisa-san and shrugged.
"Because... I am pretty much unversed in that area."
Lisa spoke quietly with regret.
"Then Firill-san, have you already named your fictional armament?"
Curious, I tried asking.
"...Yes. My fictional armament is called the Necronomicon."
"Oh, I have heard of that! It is the name of a legendary grimoire!"
"Correct, Mitsuki... Are you familiar with this kind of topic?"
Firill-san looked at me, somewhat surprised."
"Yes. They appear often in anime and games. I am also interested in myths from around the world."
I nodded slightly proudly.
"Ah... Do you want to name Lisa's spear?"
"Eh!? Me?"
"Yes, because she won't be able to decide at this rate. Is this okay, Lisa?"
After Firill-san asked, Lisa-san made a complicated expression.
"W-Well... I suppose I could consider it as a candidate if it has a nice ring to it."
"In that case—Hmm... Lisa-san, the fictional armament just now was a spear, is that right?"
I thought of names while confirming with Lisa.
"Yes, indeed. Of various skills I have studied, techniques of the spear have been my preference."
"Then... How about Gungnir? It is the legendary spear held by Odin, the supreme god in Norse mythology."
I suggested the first name that came to mind with the mention of spears.
"T-That does feel very powerful. Gungnir... I don't dislike the sound of that."
"You like it, Lisa?"
When Firill-san asked, Lisa-san nodded hesitantly.
"Well... Umm, I believe it is a noble name that befits me."
Hearing this reply, Firill made a thumbs-up sign to me.
"Great, Mitsuki. Lisa likes it very much."
"I-I am honored!"
I could not help but breathe a sigh of relief. Seeing me react that way, Lisa shyly avoided eye contact.
"A-Anyway, I will simply add it to the list of candidates! B-But... Thank you."
"Yes!"
I felt excited that relations were improving between Lisa and me.
"Lisa Highwalker, Firill Crest and Mononobe Mitsuki, the practical lesson is about to begin."
After talking to the staff, Haruka-san came over.
"I am the one in charge of instruction. First, I will explain to Mononobe Mitsuki, the newcomer, about fictional armaments—"
"Oh, Lisa went ahead and explained it on her own already."
Firill raised her hand and reported.

"H-Hold on, Firill-san!"
Lisa cried out frantically. Haruka-san ignored them and continued.
"Fufu, I see. Then let the training begin. Watch carefully, Mononobe Mitsuki."
Saying that, Haruka-san raised her right hand overhead. Then a black sphere —dark matter—appeared.
"Ama no Murakumo."
Haruka-san spoke sharply. Then the dark matter's outline began to shake, narrow and lengthen, stretching out.
I initially thought it would be a spear, but it was not.
It was a massive sword almost reaching Haruka-san's height. The blade glowed with faint violet light.
Compared to Lisa-san's fictional armament earlier, the level of perfection was on a completely different league. The outline was so stable that it seemed completely materialized to me.
"This is my fictional armament, imagined as a sword. If you perform transmutation while imagining the weapon being swung, powerful attacks will naturally be achieved."
Holding her fictional armament of a sword, Haruka-san glanced at the control room.
A deep rumbling was heard in the training site. A black cube descended from the ceiling. It was... probably a block of iron.
"I will now use transmutation to slice that iron block."
"Slice...?"
She was separated from the iron block by dozens of meters. I tilted my head in puzzlement.
"Mononobe Mitsuki, it must be hard to imagine, right? Well, a picture is worth a thousand words. Why fictional armaments are necessary... I shall demonstrate to you in this attack."
Haruka-san wielded her fictional armament in a horizontal stance and looked at the iron block afar.
The air tensed up. I gulped. Lisa-san and Firill-san were also silent, seemingly intimidated by Haruka-san's powerful presence.
"First Sword—Water Flash."
Taking a great step, Haruka-san swung her sword. Although there was no scabbard, what she performed was precisely an iai technique.
A blue trail flew out from the fictional armament—This slash bifurcated the block of iron.
"What..."
Seeing the iron block split into two, I could not help but exclaim in shock.
"What I transmuted just now was water."
Haruka-san turned to me and began to explain what she had done.
"Using water... to slice iron?"
"Indeed, compressed to high-density, water can even slice iron. Well, adding the kinetic energy of a 'slashing attack' is necessary to achieve it."

Allowing the fictional armament in her hand to dissipate in the air, Haruka-san smiled.
"A slashing attack...
"Indeed—If you use a fictional armament to perform transmutation, you will subconsciously picture the use of the weapon, won't you? This subconscious aspect is crucial. By focusing on the transmutation, you will increase your attack speed. It is also possible to apply high-end variations in your attacks."
Finishing, Haruka-san patted me on the head.
"It would be best if you could find a fictional armament suited to you. Do you have any experience in martial arts?"
"Umm, I do not have any special..."
Although I felt embarrassed, I still had to answer honestly.
"You do not need to have trained properly. Since you are using a fictional armament, no skill is required. If you have no experience handling a weapon, you can also imagine 'magic' like Firill Crest—"
"Oh... If it is just a little bit, I have been exposed to archery at school before during experiential learning... B-But I never succeeded in striking the archery target with the arrow..."
I brought up what I suddenly remembered.
"Don't worry, that's good enough. Try a bow first."
"Understood. But... Why do we need this level of combat power?"
I nodded while I asked.
With Midgard under the protection of such an airtight defense system, I could not think of any occasion when fighting would be necessary.
"Hopes are currently placed on Ds as trump cards in battles against dragons."
"Trump cards in battles against dragons..."
I gasped and repeated Haruka-san's words.
"The phenomena caused by transmutation can easily surpass modern weapons. We have the potential to deliver humanity from dragon disasters. Consequently, I hope you will hone your skills."
"Y-Yes... I will work hard!"
So this was training for the purpose of fighting dragons...
While feeling shocked by this, I generated dark matter on my palm.
What flashed in my mind was the blue giant that had approached my home town—Hekatonkheir.
I had been powerless against it, which was why Nii-san had to take everything upon himself.
...If I went through training, would I be able to protect things?
Looking at the sphere of bottomless black, I asked myself mentally.
If I could become strong, to be able to fight... That could become additional power to help me meet Nii-san, I suppose?
—No idea.
But right now, all I could do was overcome what was right in front of me.

With such feelings, I began to alter the dark matter's shape.
I transformed its appearance to a weapon capable of opposing "a certain something" that had taken Nii-san away, as well as opposing dragons—

Part 6

Encountering new things every day in Midgard, there were often times when I found myself lost.
Academics, practical applications of dark matter, duties at the dorm—There were many things I had to work on, as hard as I could. Before I knew it, two weeks already passed.
The wind howled fiercely outside the window on that day.
Trees were swaying hard, leaves were flying in the air. Looking from afar, the sea seemed gray, looking like a desolate wasteland.
"The clouds are drifting so quickly."
I looked at the sky and murmured. Firill-san nodded and concurred.
"...I hate typhoons."
"There is only wind at the moment, but it will probably rain soon. We might get drenched unless we go back..."
Looking at the sky shrouded in dark clouds, Lisa remarked gloomily.
Gathered by the window in the classroom, we all sighed together.
This was my first typhoon after arriving at Midgard. Since the dorms were nearby, lessons were not suspended even in this sort of weather. We were having class as usual.
At this moment, I heard the door open. I looked back to see Haruka-san at the doorway, looking in our direction.
"Everyone—I am sorry to say this but the practical lesson I'm in charge of today has been suspended."
We looked at each other after hearing Haruka-san.
"Because of the typhoon?"
Haruka-san shook her head at Firill's question.
"No, that is not the reason. In truth, newcomers are arriving by ship today... However, the typhoon has caused a bit of a delay. I must head out to handle this matter."
"...Newcomers."
Firill murmured with surprise.
I gasped.
Juniors arriving by ship as I had two weeks earlier... As a newcomer, this felt quite poignant to me.
"Yes, there are three of them this time. But at this rate, they will probably arrive when the wind is at its strongest. Many preparations are in order."
Hearing that, I reflexively spoke.

"E-Excuse me! Is there anything I could help with!?"
Surely, these girls must have plenty of hopes and fears. Thinking that, I could not stand by idly.
"Fufu... I see—"
Haruka-san was taken aback slightly in surprise. With her hand against the corner of her mouth, she began to ponder.
"If Mitsuki-san is helping out, I shall go as well."
"...Me too."
Immediately, Firill-san and Lisa-san also raised their hands.
"Everyone..."
I looked at them and they smiled at me.
"Then please assist the members of the student council. Follow me."
"Yes!"
Answering Haruka-san, we left the classroom to welcome our new peers.
The sky grew darker and the wind became progressively stronger.
Wearing a raincoat, I was waiting at the Academy's entrance together with the student council members.
To ensure the ship could reach the pier safely, Haruka-san and the elite members of the Counter-Dragon Squad had gone off to deploy a gigantic barrier of wind.
Lisa-san and Firill-san were at the pier while I was the Academy's entrance, standing by as emergency rescuers.
I was holding towels in my arms under my raincoat so that the new arrivals could dry themselves. At the same time, I felt terror at the power of Ds, capable of resisting a storm.
At the same time, I came to a realization. Unless I joined the Counter-Dragon Squad, I could not assist Haruka-san in any real sense.
Finally able to stabilize my fictional armament recently, I still had far to go.
—I must become stronger.
While pelted by fierce raindrops flying sideways, I thought to myself. Then I caught sight of yellow raincoats, a blur in the distance.
"They have arrived!"
I informed the student council members and waved to the new arrivals across the rain.
"Over here—!"
The girls ran over to us.
"Pwah!"
Finally reaching the entrance, the first girl forcefully took off her hood and began to wipe her face, drenched from rain.
"Are you alright!?"
I hurried to approach her and extended a towel.
"—Compared to me, the others had it worse. They were very seasick."
"But you will catch a cold at this rate."
She seemed hesitant and I pushed the towel towards her. Our hands touched lightly.

Due to getting drenched in the rain, her hand was exceptionally cold.
She looked a bit troubled, but accepted the towel when other emergency rescuers ran over to the other girls.
"—Thank you. My name is Shinomiya Miyako."
After wiping her face with the towel, she thanked me.
"..."
Rather than the fact that she shared the same family name as Haruka-san, it was her facial expression that made me gasp.
A smiling face of such dazzling beauty—
"What is your name?"
Reminded by her, I came to my senses.
"Oh, I am called... M-Mononobe Mitsuki."
I felt intimidated by her presence despite the fact that she was a newcomer and similar to me in age.
"What a nice name. Pleased to meet you, Mitsuki."
Saying that, she extended her hand to me.
"Yes—P-Pleased to meet you too."
I shook her hand stiffly and greeted.
Her skin felt cold to the touch.
However, gripping my hand in return, her hand was very strong.

Chapter 2 - Shinomiya Miyako

銃皇無尽のファフニール 外伝

ブリュンヒルデ・ヴァルキリーズ

II



ツカサ

Part 1

"Say, Miyako-san. We will be roommates starting from today. I look forward to our time together."
Located in the girls dormitories, this room was furnished with a bunk bed and study desks. I led Shinomiya Miyako-san to the room I had been living in alone and bowed to her.
Three Ds had arrived in Midgard. To think that one of them was Haruka-san's younger sister. As a result, she was assigned to Brynhildr Class. At the same time, she also became my roommate but...
"...Is something wrong?"
Just as I looked up, I inexplicably found Miyako-san looking at me, hesitating to speak as though she had something stuck in her back teeth.
The window was clattering.
Although the typhoon had passed over Midgard, strong wind was still blowing in the dark environment outside the window.
"Hmm... Listen here, Mitsuki."
She put down her backpack on the ground and scratched her head as though having difficulty in articulating some kind of dilemma.
"Oh... Could it be that you do not wish to live with me? If you would like a single room, I can ask Haruka-san right away—"
The system of roommates was not because there were no enough rooms. Instead, it was intended to help fill the void in the hearts of Ds who had been separated from their families But of course, there were also people who preferred to alone. In those cases, single rooms would be granted so long as they made an application, but perhaps Miyako-san had probably missed her chance to bring it up.
While I was thinking that, Miyako-san frantically waved her hands at me.
"No, that's not it. I'm very happy to have you as my roommate, Mitsuki! What I wanted to point out was, umm, your way of speaking..."
"Way of speaking?"
What did that mean? I tilted my head in puzzlement. Then Miyako-san stared straight into my eyes and said:
"Hmm—Well, Mitsuki, you have seniority over me and we'll be roommates from now on... Can you stop using polite language? You don't need to add '-san' to my name."
"Eh, but—"
The unexpected request placed me at a loss how to react.

"Please. I think it'll be more friendly that way."
Miyako pleaded with fervent eyes. Overwhelmed by her vigor, I nodded.
"...Since you went out of your way to ask, Miyako-san."
"Thank you, Mitsuki! But don't use Miyako-san, call me Miyako."
Thanking me excitedly, she corrected me.
"O-Okay, my apologies—Oh no, sorry... Miyako."
"Great, that's exactly it! Very good!"
"...I have been using polite language the whole time ever since coming to Midgard. Looks like I will need some time to adjust."
I sighed in front of the delighted Miyako.
Still, that did not imply that I disliked this. While my heart was entangled in feelings of embarrassment, I had a feeling that every day from now on was going to be very eventful.
And this feeling of mine then came true.
"Thank you for your hospitality, Mitsuki-san."
"...Good evening!"
Lisa-san and Firill-san opened the unlocked door and entered the room.
"What are you two doing here?"
I asked them.
"Although our offerings are quite modest, we would like to hold a welcoming party for her."
Lisa-san scratched her cheek a little shyly.
"I brought... plenty of snacks."
Firill-san scattered an armful of snacks on the bed.
"Wow! Thank you both!"
Miyako happily thanked them.
"Haruka-san will apparently arrive later, so let us get started first."
"Sweet things are Onee-chan's favorite, so we'd better eat first while we can."
Miyako's response to Lisa-san, sitting opposite her on the floor, revealed an unexpected side to Haruka-san.
"Fufu... I brought many things to play in addition to snacks. No one's getting any sleep tonight."
With an eerie smile, Firill-san took out a pack of cards from her pocket.
It looked like it was going to be a long and fun-filled night.
I smiled naturally while eating sweet cookies.
Every day was filled with joy.
The only thing missing was—Nii-san.

Part 2

"Although the principal has tried many different methods, she still has not been able to locate your brother—Mononobe Yuu. Please be patient. I'm sorry."
Inside the deserted school courtyard, Haruka-san and I were in the middle of a discussion, sitting at benches set up around a flowerbed.
It had been roughly a month since I arrived in Midgard. Haruka-san would frequently update me on the investigation of my brother like this.
"N-No, I should thank all of you instead... I am honestly grateful for receiving everyone's assistance already."
I frantically shook my head and stopped Haruka-san who was bowing her head to me in apology.
Those were my honest words. On my own, I would have absolutely no idea where or how to start investigating.
"Thank you for saying that, but I will also try every possible means to continue the investigation. This nominal military rank of mine will definitely come in handy."
Haruka-san's face expressed conviction. Although I felt extremely grateful for what she said, I was intrigued by the latter part of her statement.
"Military rank...?"
"Oh—Right, this has not been explained to ordinary students yet. In truth—All Ds will apparently receive military ranks and titles in anticipation of conducting joint operations with NIFL in battles against dragons."
Haruka-san explained to me with a slightly complicated expression on her face.
"We... have to become soldiers?"
"Well, just in principle. Your daily lives won't change much. Also, it would be a bit odd for NIFL to be fighting alongside us. That being said, it wouldn't be appropriate unless those of us participating in battle are soldiers, right?"
"Things seem to be quite... difficult."
Not quite comprehending adult matters and principles, I concurred vaguely.
"Newcomers like you will become Private 2nd Class. As the captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad, I will become Colonel. Although I'm currently unsure what clearance level it affords me... I will make full use of it. Leave it to me."
Smiling with fortitude, Haruka-san patted me on the shoulder.

Surely she was trying to encourage me, but it was not that easy for me to accept things so readily.
'Leave everything to me.'
I recalled the one I held dear, whose whereabouts were unknown.
Right now, I had no power at all, but I did not want to leave everything to others either.
"Excuse me... Haruka-san."
Mustering my determination, I spoke up.
"What is it?"
"What must I do... in order to raise my military rank?"
Realizing my thoughts from this question, Haruka-san showed a slightly more tense expression.
"A relatively more direct method is to become part of the student council and the Counter-Dragon Squad. Holding special positions would allow you to receive a commensurate rank, I suppose. However, even if you do that, whether or not your brother could be found is still..."
"I understand. However, I hate waiting without doing anything!"
I spoke my mind and interrupted Haruka-san in the middle of her sentence.
After gazing at me for a while, Haruka-san stood up.
"In that case, just do what you can. Student council elections are far off, but the selection test for the Counter-Dragon Squad will be held a month from now."
"Y-Yes! I will definitely try my best!"
After I replied in full vigor, Haruka-san smiled contentedly. After that, she left while waving to me.

Part 3

That night, after lights out, I was in my bedroom.
Under the covers in the lower bunk, I spoke to Miyako who was lying on the upper bunk.
"Miyako... Are you still awake?"
"Hmm...? What's... up...?"
I heard a drowsy voice in response.
"I plan to... take the Counter-Dragon Squad entrance test."
"Counter-Dragon Squad...? Uh... Ehhhh!?"
A surprised voice, followed by a thud from the upper bunk.
"Owww... I hit my head on the ceiling... Anyway, forget that!"
Miyako looked down at me from the upper bunk.
"Mitsuki, are you for real?"
Hanging upside-down, Miyako asked me.
"Yes."
I nodded while in bed. Immediately, Miyako climbed down nimbly and squeezed into the lower bunk beside me.
"What's wrong!? Why so suddenly—"
"There is something I wish to do..."
I replied ambiguously with a wry smile. The principal and Haruka-san had warned me not to disclose about my brother—the existence of a male D—without permission.
"Sheesh, here you go again with that face."
Pouting unhappily, Miyako stared at me.
"That face?"
"Mitsuki, every now and then, you'd make a face like you're thinking about something. Sad... and anxious, it's how it feels. You know you can tell me if there's anything troubling you."
"Well..."
I was very happy to hear that from her, but I could not break my promise.
"Is this something you can't tell me?"
Miyako was showing a sad expression. Seeing that, I hastily held her hand.
"Umm, Miyako, I'm not allowed to explain the details of this matter, but... If it's okay for me to tell you vaguely, I'd like you to listen... Will you hear me out?"
"Mitsuki..."

After showing slight surprise on her face, Miyako immediately looked serious.
"Yes, it's fine. I understand. Tell me."
"Thank you, Miyako—Uh, why are you lying in my bed?"
I asked Miyako who was on my bed next to me.
"It's easier to listen like this. Is this okay with you, Mitsuki?"
"Well... I guess so."
I accepted it although I felt a bit embarrassed.
Next, Miyako happily got under my covers and leaned her shoulder against me.
Through the thin pajamas, I could feel the warmth and softness of her body.
"This feels like a school trip. It's so fun! Wanna play cards?"
"Miyako, have you forgotten your original purpose?"
"Ahaha, just kidding. I'll listen to you properly. Relax."
Grinning mischievously, Miyako gazed intently at me, so close that I could feel her breathing.
Although my heart was racing from being so close to her, I still began to explain.
"There is someone... I want to see."
"Someone you want to see?"
Miyako blinked and asked.
"Yes... But I don't know where he is... Right now, I have no way of finding him... That's why, I want to try everything possible to increase the number of things I can do."
I gazed into Miyao's eyes and revealed my honest intentions.
"That's why you're taking part in the Counter-Dragon Squad selection test?"
I nodded at Miyako.
"That's right... I also plan on joining the student council after that. It's crazy... Right?"
Wondering if I shocked her, I peered at Miyako's face.
After showing a surprised expression, she sighed lightly.
"It's very crazy... But Mitsuki, you've already made your decision, right?"
"—Yes."
I nodded without any hesitation.
"You want to see this person this much? Someone... very dear to you?"
"Yes."
I nodded clearly.
"I see..."
After showing a slightly sad look, Miyako immediately switched to her usual smiling face.
"In that case, let's do it! We must start special training tomorrow!"
"S-Special training?"
Miyako's sudden words confused me.
"To be honest, I don't think you'll pass the way you are right now, okay? Mitsuki, you can't even fly yet."

"Ooh..."
"In that case, let's have special training. I'll ask Onee-chan to see if we can use a training site after school. Don't worry, I'll accompany you. Let's join the Counter-Dragon Squad together!"
"Eh, you too, Miyako?"
Very surprised, I stared at her face intently.
"Yes, because I'm very worried about you, Mitsuki."
"But I'm clearly the senior here..."
"Yeah, by a mere two weeks, right? Besides, I can't leave you alone, Mitsuki."
Miyako declared quietly with a serious expression.
"...Why?"
"Because you seem so lonely. It's not just today, you've always been like that. That's why, I'm very concerned."
After saying that, Miyako grabbed my hand under the covers.
"—I want to stay by your side. All the time, until the day you meet the one you hold dear, Mitsuki."
Then while staring at me, she smiled gently.
"And so, you won't be lonely anymore."
"Miyako..."
Her words filled my heart with warmth.
The emptiness of Nii-san's absence, I did not wish to forget it—I must not forget it.
But right now, for a brief while, I wished to rely on this warmth slightly.

Part 4

"—Brionac!"
Transmitting my imagination to the generated dark matter, I shaped its form.
The fictional armament took the form of a bow. Its surface, slightly materialized, glowed with faint iridescence.
"Kusanagi!"
Next to me, Miyako summoned her fictional armament in the form of a naginata.
We were at training site number two underground of the school. Having asked Haruka-san for permission to use the training site, we carried out our special training here every day.
"The fictional armament doesn't collapse as long as you don't get careless."
Miyako swung her naginata to confirm whether there were any distortions in its outline.
"Yes.. But the hard part starts here."
Holding my fictional armament, I looked up.
This training site was meant for flying practice. Its ceiling was very high while the floor was covered by soft cushioning.
"Today, I must—"
—Touch the ceiling. I mustered my determination and generated air from my fictional armament.
As wind enveloped my surroundings, my body gradually became lighter.
After I increased the transmutation output, I slowly floated up.
"Mitsuki, looking good!"
Miyako looked up at me and commented.
"......"
However, I could not afford the luxury of replying to her. Trying my best to maintain balance, I carefully increased my altitude.
Which direction to go, how much air to generate—Such questions could only be answered by my body's senses.
Even if I went through flight training once a week, it would probably take a year to achieve proper control of the body... But the test was a month from now.
By that time, I had to be able to fly into the sky at least.
Apart from special training as Miyako had suggested, there was no other way to pass.

However, just as I got closer to the ceiling, my balance suddenly collapsed.
"Kyah—"
I must have made a mistake in my transmutation output. The wind surrounding me dissipated and I fell to the ground.
Poof, I was caught by soft cushioning. I looked up at the ceiling, far off in the distance.
"Sigh... Still no good."
"But I think you were able to fly higher. It's probably a new record!"
Miyako's face came into view. She looked at me while smiling cheerfully.
"Getting praised by you doesn't make me happy. Miyako, you're clearly able to touch the ceiling with your hand already."
I pouted and avoided her gaze.
Despite being two weeks her senior as a student at Midgard, as soon as our special training started, I ended up being the one to play catch up.
I was very happy that she was willing to keep me company during special training like this, but the sight of the gap between us was filling me with chagrin.
"Don't worry. I simply figured out the trick, that's all."
"Then tell me that trick."
"Eh... Without thinking about it, that kind of feeling?"
"Seriously—"
I sighed at Miyako's sloppy answer.
At that moment, a heavy noise was heard inside the training site.
"Hmm...?"
I got up and looked in the noise's direction to see two female students entering from the opened door.
"Eh, it's Lisa and Firill."
Miyako exclaimed their names in surprise. The two girls exchanged glances with us then approached. Due to their feet sinking into the soft floor with every step, walking was quite difficult for them.
"...Recently, you've vanished after school—So this is where you've been."
"Secret training between the two of you... So unfair."
Slightly displeased, Lisa-san and Firill-san glared at us.
"Could it be that you heard from Haruka-san?"
Lisa nodded in response to my question.
"Indeed. You two are training in preparation for the Counter-Dragon Squad's selection test, aren't you? Why did you tell us?"
"Because chances are clearly slim, umm... I felt too embarrassed to bring it up—"
Lisa sighed deeply after hearing my reply.
"Have I ever treated you like a fool? Do not underestimate me. I am not one to mock other's efforts. Rather—The major problem here is the gap arising between us due to your special training."
Lisa-san spoke with arms akimbo. Next to her, Firill-san nodded.

"That's right... Mitsuki and Miyako, you've gotten better and better lately. I'd really hate it if I get overtaken."
"Consequently, we shall take part in the special training too, starting today! Naturally, we intend to take the Counter-Dragon Squad's admission test as well!"
Lisa puffed out her chest and declared.
"Eh!? Weren't you two uninterested in the Counter-Dragon Squad the whole time until now?"
Faced with Miyako's question, Firill-san nodded affirmatively.
"Indeed, we were uninterested. But I want to do something."
"Compared to earning money by transmuting scarce resources, this is more interesting."
After saying that, Lisa-san raised her right hand and generated dark matter.
"—Gungnir!"
Readying her summoned fictional armament of a spear, she smiled at me.
"It would tarnish the name of this divine spear, chosen by you, if I do not use it for battle. Come, let the special training begin."
"Y-Yes!"
I nodded and constructed my bow-shaped fictional armament again.
Inside this training site, which had become more lively, flight practice resumed.
Although I was the worst at flying out of all of us, for some reason, I did not feel disheartened at all—

Part 5

A month later...

At training site number three, the most spacious of them all, the Counter-Dragon Squad's selection test was under way.

"Just as its name implies, the Counter-Dragon Squad is a team assembled for the sake of fighting dragons. Planned operations to take out dragons have included the Counter-Dragon Squad in their calculations."

The one speaking in front of everyone was Haruka-san who stood as both the captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad and the examination officer.

"This is not a job where half-baked resolve would suffice. Naturally, there are risks involved. Only those capable of striving forward bravely in the face of dragons are eligible to continue."

Haruka-san spoke to us solemnly.

Including Miyako, Lisa-san, Firill-san and myself, there were a total of seven students taking the test.

I glanced around me. No one left. Everyone must have their own reason for fighting.

After confirming that no one was giving up, Haruka-san indicated the target set up in the training site.

"Well then, let the test begin. You will be assessed on only two aspects, namely, your ability to control offensive transmutation and your mobility during flight through the transmutation of air."

Several giant rings were suspended from the training site's ceiling. On the floor was a giant block of iron.

"First, aim at the iron block target and attack while you're on the ground. Next, fly through all the rings then attack the iron block while flying. Rather than attack power, your assessment will prioritize accuracy more. Try to be as swift as possible when moving around."

Attacking from the air...

Hearing that, I began to panic inside. Having exhausted all my efforts on flight training, I had not practiced this at all.

"—Don't worry. Just cross that bridge when you get to it."

As though reading my mind, Miyako spoke softly next to me.

Thanks to her encouragement, I was able to relax a little.

"Having come this far already, all that remains is rising to the occasion."

"Mitsuki, do your best."

Lisa-san and Firill-san encouraged me from behind.

Right—It was a foolhardy attempt to begin with. All I had to do was give it my best.
Mustering my resolve, I clenched my fist tightly.
"Next up—Mononobe Mitsuki of Brynhildr Class!"
"Yes!"
When my turn came, I was the second last to take the test.
Lisa-san and Firill-san had already completed the test with a comfortable margin. Only Miyako and I were left.
"Mitsuki! Relax!"
I nodded at Miyako's encouragement and walked over to the designated spot.
First, I had to launch an attack from this position.
"—Brionac!"
I summoned my fictional armament and nocked an arrow of dark matter.
Imagining an arrow made of compressed air, I poured dark matter into it.
"First Arrow—Forked Wind!"
With a shout, I released the arrow.
This technique was named in a similar manner as Haruka-san's.
As in the case of fictional armaments, naming moves was a way to further strengthen one's imagination.
The flying black arrow of dark matter turned into countless bullets of air, striking the iron block.
Accompanied by the noise of heavy impacts, a large depression appeared on the iron block's surface.
...Thank goodness, I struck the target.
Despite feeling relieved, I could not relax yet. The important part had yet to come.
Passing through the rings suspended from the ceiling was a test of mobility.
"—"
I concentrated and created air in my surroundings. Adjusting the output, I flew up bit by bit.
My flying skill was still far from perfect.
To an observer, my method of flying probably looked very clumsy, but this was the best I could do at my current level.
In any case, I took care not to fall while passing through the rings, one at a time.
So slow—
Although I was aware of that, I still suppressed my impatient feelings while focusing on the task of controlling wind.
With that... the final one was done.
Having passed through all the rings, I looked downwards.
Behind me was the target I had to strike from this location. However, not only was the distance was much farther than for the ground attack but I also had to attack from an unstable posture.

Furthermore, it was very difficult to perform an attack transmutation while simultaneously generating air for flying.
Someone accustomed to flying would be able to focus their mind fully on attacking... But in my case, I had no choice but to divert my attention to both sides.
"...But if I miss..."
I had made my decision. I wanted to obtain power. To this end, I must join the Counter-Dragon Squad.
I tried my best to adjust my posture and readied the divine bow.
That target was a dragon. The enemy I must defeat. The threat looming over me!
What I recalled from memory was the blue giant that had trampled my hometown.
I had had enough of losing. This time, by my very own hand, I must—!
"Second Arrow—Night Blaze!!"
Pouring in my battle spirit, I released the arrow.
The dark matter turned into a great amount of heat, scorching the air to produce a red glow. However—
"Ah..."
The searing arrow missed slightly, embedding itself into the ground—causing a giant explosion.
I had probably neglected flying the instant I released the arrow. As a result, my posture had gone off-kilter.
"..."
Until this point, no one had missed their mark. In that case, surely I was going to—
Enduring my chagrin, I descended to the ground.
A foolhardy attempt after all...
"Okay, next up is Shinomiya Miyako of Brynhildr Class!"
Taking the test after me, Miyako patted me on the shoulder as she brushed past me.
"Don't worry, Mitsuki."
Miyako finished every task with virtual perfection.
Don't worry... How could I not worry?
Watching her walking back, I sighed in my heart. No matter how you cut it, my results were the worst.
I wanted some quiet time on my own, so I sat down with my knees drawn up to my chest and rested my face against my knees. Very considerately, Miyako and the others did not come over to talk to me.
Finally, I heard Haruka-san's voice.
"Well then, I will now announce the name list of those who passed the Counter-Dragon Squad test."
"Mitsuki, the list is getting announced!"
Miyako shook me. I already knew the outcome, but I still looked up for the sake of accepting reality.

Although I did not know how many of us were chosen from the top, there was no question that I would be excluded.
"A total of seven participants in the test—Everyone passed. No one failed."
"Eh!?"
I could not help but cry out. Everyone's gaze focused on me.
"Is there a problem, Mononobe Mitsuki?"
Hearing Haruka-san's question, I frantically spoke up.
"U-Umm, you just said that, everyone passed—"
"Indeed, that is correct."
"But I am the only one who missed the second shot... And I also flew very slowly..."
Unable to contain my disbelief, I raised the issue.
"Indeed, you were flying the slowest, but you kept everything under proper control. As for missing the second shot, the iron's surface actually melted from the heat. Although you did not score a direct hit, it was definitely effective as an attack. Hence, I judged that you have achieved minimum standards for passing."
"Then I really..."
"Indeed. Furthermore, every additional personnel is needed for the current Counter-Dragon Squad. Rather than a test carried out to eliminate people, the purpose of testing was to see the extent our combatants are capable of. Even if you achieved the worst result, you'll still pass as long as you met minimum standards."
"I-Is that how it works...?"
After hearing Haruka-san's explanation, I felt utterly drained.
"See, I said you didn't have to worry, right?"
Lying on the floor beside me, Miyako spoke to me, facing the ceiling.
"Miyako... Did you already know that coming in last could still pass?"
I pouted unhappily and glared at her.
"Hmm, I suppose? But people like us who recently arrived in Midgard usually can't achieve the 'minimum standards' mentioned by Onee-chan. Ultimately, we were only able to pass because we worked hard."
She smiled and spoke.
Presumably to prevent me from getting careless, she had kept secret the fact that there was no upper limit to how many people could pass.
"Seriously... Miyako."
My anger subsided completely and I sighed.
"Congrats for passing!"
Firill-san hugged me from behind.
"With this, every student in Brynhildr Class has enlisted in the Counter-Dragon Squad."
Lisa murmured happily.
"You girls over there, save the joyous celebration for later. We will begin a simple orientation now."

While our overjoyed emotions were getting the better of us, Haruka-san prompted us with a reminder and we hastily stood at attention.
"S-Sorry."
I apologized to Haruka-san but Miyako whispered to me unrepentantly.
"—We're having a celebration party afterwards, right?"
I nodded firmly to agree with her suggestion.

Part 6

"Okay, to celebrate passing the test, cheers!"
Miyako raised her full glass of orange juice and took the lead.
Inside my not particularly spacious room, all members of Brynhildr Class had gathered, including Haruka-san.
"Cheers~!"
I concurred and bumped glasses with everyone.
"...I thank you all sincerely from the bottom of my heart for volunteering to join the Counter-Dragon Squad. Let us gather our powers together and fight when an emergency comes up."
Haruka-san bowed her head slightly and thanked us.
"Onee-chan, is the Counter-Dragon Squad that in need of people?"
Finishing her orange juice in one breath, Miyako asked Haruka-san.
"Well, there are very few people willing to take on risky jobs. Although Ds wield potent powers, there is no obligatory reason to fight."
Smiling wryly, Haruka-san replied.
Indeed, hopes were placed on Ds as trump cards in battles against dragons. However, from our perspective, this was merely one out of various options to contribute to society. Whether we fight or not was a choice for us to make on our own.
Hence... It was only natural that the majority had no wish to put themselves in danger.
"Umm, I have a rather impertinent question—"
Lisa-san spoke hesitantly to Haruka-san.
"What's your question?"
"Haruka-san, do you have a reason to fight?"
The answer to Lisa-san's question was something I also wanted to know. How was Haruka-san going to answer? With my lips pressed to the edge of my glass, I secretly observed Haruka-san's expression.
"Well... I do have one—but it might not be the kind of noble reason that would resonate with you girls."
Hearing this, Firill-san tilted her head.
"Is it... something like revenge against dragons?"
"No, I don't have any motive as clear-cut as that. Although my parents had suffered from the dragon disasters caused by Vritra—before I was born—that's something too far off in the past for me. On a personal level, I don't feel any particular hatred towards dragons."

Miyako nodded at Haruka-san's explanation.
"We never got caught up in any dragon disasters."
"Indeed—If there is a target to hate, it would be NIFL if anything."
Haruka-san whispered in a voice of revulsion.
"NIFL...?"
I wondered what this was about while repeating her words.
"Back when I was sent here, Midgard was still under NIFL's management as an isolation facility for Ds. As it so happened, the Ds' human rights movement started at the time, so I did not suffer any inhumane treatment. However, living under strict and total control was very stifling, to be honest."
Haruka-san clenched her fist and spoke forcefully.
"Does this relate to the Counter-Dragon Squad?"
Lisa-san leaned forward and asked Haruka-san.
"Indeed, I want to prove that myself—and all Ds—are beneficial to humanity. That we are more valuable than those people at NIFL who treated me like a monster."
"Onee-chan hates losing after all—"
Miyako smiled with a shrug.
"Miyako, please hold your tongue. Well—Consequently, I went to assist in transmuting scarce resources while actively participating in the planning of operations to take down dragons. Before I knew it, I was already holding office as both student council president and the captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad."
Haruka-san coughed then went back on topic.
"—Oh I see now. Thank you for telling me all this, Haruka-san. It will be very valuable for reference."
Lisa-san bowed her head solemnly and thanked Haruka-san.
"Not at all, no need to thank me. Rather, I was afraid I might've disillusioned you all..."
"Nothing of that sort! I believe that your intentions are very noble, Haruka-san!"
As Lisa-san shook her head frantically, I also concurred.
"Haruka-san, you are fighting for the sake of all Ds—I respect you very much!"
"Ooh... Stop flattering me."
Haruka-san shyly avoided my gaze.
"Haruka-san is blushing. That's so cute..."
Haruka-san's face grew even redder after she heard Firill's murmuring.
"Onee-chan is someone who easily gets embarrassed! Come on, let's all continue to praise her! Make her turn even redder!"
"Enough, Miyako! I give you an inch and you'll take a mile!"
Haruka-san smacked Miyako, the culprit who was instigating us, on the head.
"Oww—that's so mean, Onee-chan!"

Holding her head in an exaggerated manner, Miyako smiled happily.
I also relaxed my tense expression.
Haruka-san was truly amazing. And today, after joining the Counter-Dragon Squad, I had gotten one step closer to her.
Although Nii-san, whose whereabouts were unknown, was still far beyond reach—As long as I kept on working hard like Haruka-san, one day, surely...
I prayed intensely in my heart for Nii-san to join in these happy everyday lives of ours.

Chapter 3 - Brynhildr Class

銃皇無尽のファフニール 外伝

ブリュンヒルデ・ヴァルキリーズ

III



ツカサ

Part 1

Slam—

As though trying to stem the tide of emotions overflowing from my heart, I shut the window.

"...Thanks for the past year."

Taking down the nameplate reading "Mononobe Mitsuki" hanging outside the door, I bid farewell to this room that was filled with memories.

What flashed through my mind was the party we had held to celebrate passing the Counter-Dragon Squad's admission test. Listening to Haruka-san's story, eating snacks while making a lot of noise, we even ended up scolded by the dorm warden... We really enjoyed ourselves. However, that was more than a year ago.

—The nameplate of my roommate, Shinomiya Miyako, had been taken down half a year earlier.

With my hands occupied with the last of my luggage, I walked along the corridor in the girls dorms.

The girls dorms were silent in the early morning with no one coming in or out. This was precisely why I had chosen such a time, but—

"Mononobe Mitsuki, are you moving to your personal living quarters starting today?"

As though she had been waiting for me, the figure of a female student with a ponytail appeared from around a corner in the corridor.

"Haruka-san..."

I called out the name of the senior student and stopped walking.

"I would like to speak with you."

After saying that, Haruka-san took a heavily laden bag off my hands.

"Let me take your luggage. Walk with me until you reach your dorm."

"N-No way! I cannot have you carry my luggage, Haruka-san—"

I frantically tried to take my luggage back, but she evaded me.

"You don't need to mind. This is probably my last opportunity to help you as your senior."

"Eh...?"

What was going on? I frowned and followed after her.

After leaving the girls dorms, we walked along the coastal road.

The morning air was very refreshing, putting one's mood at ease. The sunlight was already very strong.

Striking the white beach, the sound of breaking waves could be heard regularly.
"—I, too, am about to graduate at last."
Holding my bag, walking in front, Haruka spoke quietly. Although it was a light whisper, which even the rustling of trees could drown out—Having waited the whole time for her to speak, I did not miss her words.
"Graduate...? Could it be that your dark matter is already—"
"Indeed. Although there were warning signs after the Kraken battle, starting last night, I no longer have the ability to generate dark matter at last. My dragon mark has also vanished completely."
Haruka-san confirmed my question without looking back.
This meant that Haruka-san was no longer a D. She was going to graduate from Midgard—this school.
"...I see."
I was supposed to praise her achievements and congratulate her on moving to a new phase of life.
However, what came out of my lips was merely a noncommital remark. Currently in Midgard, Haruka-san was the only person with whom I could speak my true thoughts. Since she was about to leave, an unbearable feeling of loneliness surged in my heart.
Haruka-san slowed down her pace slightly and placed her hand on my shoulder.
"Due to my graduation, the Counter-Dragon Squad will be reorganized anew—The student council will also hold a by-election, I suppose. I will recommend you as my successor on both fronts."
"What—"
I could not help but gasp. Haruka-san was saying that she would entrust the positions of student council president and captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad entirely to me.
"Now that it is confirmed that dragons are seeking 'mates'—You are everyone's hope as the Kraken's slayer. In preparation for the next time a dragon attacks, I hope you will accept these jobs."
"..."
I bit my lip hard and lowered my head.
Memories, confined to that room in the girls dorms, flashed through my mind. They were almost entirely dominated by the smiling face of my best friend, Miyako.
The sin of taking that away by my own hand—was never going to vanish. I must abandon all expectations.
However, I had also made my decision. In order to protect my comrades, I must continue to fight.
There was nothing I could do apart from that.
"—I understand. I will put my life on the line to fulfill my duties."
Haruka-san smiled after I said that.

"Thank you... But there is no need to put your life on the line. There are other things you still need to do."
Haruka-san pointed ahead. Over there, I could see the roof of the personal living quarters I was going to live in from now on.
"As a reward for vanquishing the Kraken, this is the personal living quarters you wished for. That wish probably included considerations for your brother, right?"
"Well..."
I avoided eye contact because she was right. The principal had said she would grant any wish no matter what, so I voiced my wish for a personal dorm.
Although the pain of living in that room with Miyako gone was partially the reason, more importantly, I wanted a place where Nii-san could live after coming to Midgard.
However, this was an act of seeking personal happiness for me. I clearly had lost that kind of right already—
"There is nothing to be ashamed of. I feel relieved that you still haven't abandoned your personal wish. Hence, I hope you will make use of the power you are about to gain to this end."
Captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad and student council president. My military rank would rise all at once.
In that case, the chances of locating Nii-san might increase a little too.
"But that and my rightful duties..."
"It's not necessarily unrelated. There might be other compatriots, Ds, imprisoned by NIFL, you know? Rescuing him is your responsibility as an upcoming leader of the Ds. Don't worry, I will help you too."
"Eh...? But Haruka-san, you are already—"
Haruka-san smile wryly in response to my confused gaze.
"After graduating, I will continue to stay as Midgard's staff. From now on, I will support you as a teacher of the school rather than as a senior student."
"—Could you tell me this kind of thing earlier!?"
Having mistakenly believed she was surely leaving, I complained loudly.
"Sorry. I wanted to save this good news to tell you at the end."
"Seriously... Haruka-san, you are malicious like this every now and then."
Pouting, I pretended to sulk but I was actually overjoyed inside.
Did my face betray my feelings of joy? Haruka-san smiled and touched my head.
"Really? But I never noticed."
"Please treat your juniors more gently!"
Despite saying that, noone knew better than I that Haruka-san was actually the most gentle person alive.
"Haha—In that case, show me by example. Newcomers will be joining Brynhildr Class immediately. Mononobe Mitsuki, you will guide them as their gentle senior when they arrive."

Newcomers—Surprised by this word, I puffed out my chest vigorously and nodded.
"Understood. Leave it to me."
This was surely the "me" that Haruka-san wanted—

Part 2

From the transport ship moored at the pier, newly arrived Ds with uneasy expressions descended.
One of them was a lively girl with a ponytail. Another was a petite girl with red hair.
"—Welcome to Midgard. I am Mononobe Mitsuki, student council president and captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad. After I greeted them, the red-haired girl hid behind the other girl.
"Ahaha, sorry about that. She's very shy. I'm Ariella Lu. Thank you for coming out to welcome us."
The ponytailed girl—Ariella-san—smiled wryly as she introduced herself.
"...Come on, Ren. Say hi."
At Ariella-san's urging, the red-haired girl timidly poked her head out.
"Mm... I'm, Ren Miyazawa."
She spoke her own name quietly then hid behind Ariella-san's back again.
"Ariella-san and Ren-san. Pleased to make your acquaintance."
"Yes, nice to meet you too."
"Mm."
I bowed my head, then Ariella-san responded cheerfully while Ren-san replied in a very quiet voice.
"—Mitsuki-san."
At that moment, I heard a voice calling me from the ship.
Pulling a large piece of luggate, Mica-san looked downwards at us from the deck.
As the principal's secretary, Mica-san must have gone to accompany them on the trip to Midgard, just like in my case.
"May I trouble you to take them to their dorms first? They have quite a large quantity of luggage, which will require time to move."
"Understood!"
I turned to face the two girls after replying to Mica-san.
"Well, you will be living here from now on, all the way until adulthood... So
"Not really. This is pretty much all of my belongings. All the big ones are Ren's."
Hearing what I said, Ariella gestured to the travel bag in her hand.
"Mm! Mm!"
Then as though reprimanding Ariella-san for saying too much, Ren-san hammered Ariella's back.

"Ehh... So Ren-san, what kinds of things did you bring?"
I asked out of curiosity, but Ren-san shyly avoided my gaze. Seeing Ren-san acting like that, Ariella-san answered on her behalf.
"All kinds of things, like computers she made herself and robotic devices I don't understand. Ren's very smart and she's made many things on her own."
"Is that so...? That is amazing."
Impressed, I murmured, prompting Ren-san to lower her head shyly.
"Mm..."
Seeing her endearing reaction, I could not help but reach out to stroke her head.
"!?"
Ren-san suddenly shuddered and she instantly hid behind Ariella-san again. She was almost like a very wary kitten.
"Sorry, Ren-san, did I scare you?"
"Mm..."
Ren-san emerged from behind Ariella-san to show half her face and nodded.
"Don't feel too concerned. Although she's like this for now, it'll be better in a few days once she gets familiar. When I met Ren for the first time, she was hiding shyly in her room."
Smiling wryly, Ariella-san explained Ren-san's wary behavior.
"...You two knew each other before arriving here?"
"Yeah, we lived together. Although we're not blood-related, we're listed as sisters on the Japanese family registry."
Ariella-san nodded and explained her relationship with Ren-san.
"Mm..."
Ren-san confirmed what Ariella-san said but for some reason, her face was shrouded in gloom.
Noticing that, Ariella-san clapped her hands and changed the subject.
"Well, let's talk about family backgrounds later. The sun is killing me here, so..."
"Oh, sorry. Please follow me, Ariella-san and Ren-san."
I apologized and led the way.
Although they seemed to be hiding something, Ariella-san and Ren-san were definitely good people.
This was my first important task after succeeding Haruka-san.
If I did not work hard to help dispel the unease in their life in Midgard—

Part 3

Hoo—After taking a deep breath, I knocked on the door lightly.
"...Mitsuki?"
Firill-san's voice came from inside the room.
"It is me—"
My voice was congealed from nervousness.
Ever since moving to my personal living quarters, this was my first time returning to the girls dorms. I had come here to at Firill-san's invitation to hold a welcoming party for Ariella-san and Ren-san.
"Thanks for being patient. Come inside."
"Pardon the intrusion..."
I timidly opened the door and entered the room. Lisa-san was supposed to live here alone but Firill-san had moved in on her own because she had turned her assigned room into book storage.
Having gathered in the room already, Lisa-san, Firill-san, Ariella-san and Ren-san looked at me.
"U-Umm..."
"Mitsuki-san—Stop standing at the doorway. Hurry over and have a seat."
While I was hesitating about what to say, Lisa-san patted an unoccupied cushion and urged me.
"Ah yes."
I frantically nodded and sat down next to Lisa-san.
Ever since the Miyako incident, my relationship with Lisa-san had been stuck in an impasse. This was the reason why I hesitated in entering the room.
However, Ariella-san and Ren-san were present today, so it might be possible for me to speak with Lisa-san more naturally.
"So, what did you bring?"
"Smells good..."
Ariella-san and Ren-san looked at my paper box with eyes of anticipation.
"Yes, I baked some cookies. Though I am unsure whether they are to your tastes..."
I brought the box to the center and opened the lid. A sweet aroma spread in the room.
"Wow, it looks really tasty... Mitsuki, nice job."
Firill-san spoke, looking very touched, and made a thumbs-up sign at me.
"Can we try some?"

"Mm?"
Ariella-san and Ren-san looked at me with eyes of anticipation.
"Please go ahead. Be my guest."
"Here I go."
"Mm."
They picked up differently shaped cookies and brought them to their mouths.
"—Mmm, this is amazing. There's a warm taste."
"Mm... This, I like."
Seeing the two of them eat a second then a third cookie, I felt relieved.
Making snacks was something I started recently.
Wanting to reward the efforts of the members of the student council and Counter-Dragon Squad with some gifts, I decided to start learning how to make sweets from scratch.
"Indeed, the taste is not bad."
Lisa-san took a bite from a cookie and gave her comment.
"T-Thank you!"
Overjoyed, I could not help but bow my head.
"I am the one being treated—Mitsuki-san, there is no need for you to show gratitude. Thank you, these cookies are very good."
"...Yes."
Honestly rejoicing from Lisa-san's thanks, I pressed my hand firmly against my chest.
"...Eating so many will get fat. How scary. Mitsuki, is this a trap?"
Firill-san ate cookies while glaring at me resentfully.
"Firill-san, could you behave more graciously? This is Ariella-san and Ren-san's welcoming party."
Before I could speak, Lisa-san already chastised Firill-san.
Listening to their exchange, Ariella-san laughed happily.
"Ahaha—I'm so glad I was assigned to Brynhildr Class. If it's like this all the time, the days here will definitely be very fun."
"Mm."
Ren-san also agreed while eating cookies.
"Yes... Certainly, it will be a pleasure."
Keeping my overflowing emotions in my heart, I nodded.
The happy days they spoke of were something that Brynhildr Class had lost for quite a long time now.
But starting tomorrow—no, starting today—perhaps they would be back again.
Although things definitely could not return to the way they were... Although things had gone past the point of no return no matter what, I was still overjoyed to see that everyone could live happily.

Part 4

The wind was howling.
The trees outside were swaying violently while raindrops fell diagonally to strike the window.
"A day like this... reminds me of *that day*."
From the student council office, I watched the storm approaching Midgard from afar and murmured to myself.
Located in a tropical zone, Midgard was frequently attacked by typhoons.
The schedules of transport ships would avoid them as much as possible, but weather was impossible to predict precisely.
However, procedures to apply for access through Midgardsormr were extremely strict and complicated. Rescheduling due to weather would require a vast amount of paperwork to obtain authorization again.
The "invisible bridge" of Bifrost, the safe route into Midgard, would change with each application. Hence, losses in time would also be incurred.
Consequently, rescheduling was quite rare.
These were details that I learned half a year ago when I became student council president.
"—President Mitsuki! I have assembled the members of the Counter-Dragon Squad and the student council as instructed!"
Entering the student council office while panting, a girl reported to me.
"Noted. In that case, the Counter-Dragon Squad will be in charge of aiding the transport ship to reach port. Student council members will assist Midgard's staff to treat those who feel unwell. I will take command at the pier."
After issuing orders to her, I placed a communicator on my ear.
Let me make some sweets for everyone after the job is done.
Thinking that to myself, I left the office.
After passing through a wind barrier constructed by twenty people...
The transport ship arrived safely at port inside the storm.
I issued orders to others while boarding the ship in search of our new comrades who had arrived at Midgard today.
—She was supposed to be my age.
Recalling the photo and personal details from the profile I had read, I looked for her on the deck.
Next, she walked out from the cabin while supported by Mica-san.
"Mica-san!"

I called to the principal's secretary and ran over.
"—Ah, Mitsuki-san. May I trouble you to look after her? She is suffering severely from seasickness..."
"Urgh... I really wanna puke..."
Supported by Mica-san, the silver-haired girl was groaning with a pallid countenance.
"Are you alright? I shall call a stretch straight away to take you to the infirmary."
"...T-Thank you..."
She thanked me. This was the first time for her to look in my direction. Set in an exquisite face, her large and beautiful eyes looked like gemstones. Even from my perspective as a member of the same gender, I found her to be an extremely adorable girl.
"Who are you...?"
Her bloodless lips quivered to ask me.
After calling for a stretcher, I introduced myself to her.
"My name is Mononobe Mitsuki. I am the student council president and captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad."
"U-Umm, I'm..."
The girl looked like she wanted to introduce herself too but stopped halfway.
She was probably feeling unwell.
"No need to force yourself. You are Iris Freyja, aren't you? I already know your name because I have read your profile."
Iris-san nodded. Stumbling, she extended her hand.
"...Pleased to meet you, Mitsuki-chan."
"Yes, a pleasure to meet you too, Iris-san."
I shook hands with her and replied with a smile.
Although the circumstances were the same as Miyako's arrival, the impression she left me was completely different.
Compared to Miyako, who had excess capacity to care for others, Iris-san felt slightly unreliable.
However, I could feel some kind of strong will inside those eyes of hers, staring at me—

Part 5

The next day, she became the newest member of Brynhildr Class.
From my seat in the last row of desks, the one closest to the corridor side, I looked at the silver-haired girl standing at the lectern.
"I'm Iris Freyja. Nice to meet everyone today!"
Introducing herself very cheerfully, Iris-san bowed her head vigorously.
A heavy thud was heard.
Iris-san had bumped her head heard on the lectern in front of her.
"Oww... That really hurts..."
Holding her forehead, Iris-san knelt down.
"A-Are you okay there, Iris Freyja?"
Standing at the side, Shinomiya-sensei asked. Iris-san stood up unsteadily.
"Yes... Although I'm not okay... I'll bear with it."
"I-Is that so? Then please choose your seat. Feel free to select any empty spot you like."
"...Got it."
Rubbing her forehead, Iris-san nodded. However—
"Kyah!?"
Did she fail to watch her footing? Iris-san lost balance and fell down when she descended from the lectern.
"Hey.. P-Please pull yourself together! Are you alright?"
Sitting closest to the front, Lisa-san stood up and asked the fallen Iris-san.
"Ooh..."
Fallen on the floor, Iris-san groaned.
"A dojikko... I'm meeting a real one for the first time."
Extremely touched, Firill-san looked at Iris-san.
"If you're hurt, do you want me to take you to the infirmary?"
"Mm."
Ren-san expressed agreement with Ariella-san's suggestion.
"Then allow me to accompany her to the infirmary."
This was my duty so I stood up and approached Iris-san.
"—Iris-san, are you able to stand up?"
I stooped down and extended my hand. Unsteadily, she looked up.
"...Thank you, Mitsuki-chan, but I don't need to visit the infirmary."
"There is no need to force yourself, you know?"
Lisa-san reminded Iris-san with a "are you really okay?" kind of expression.
"Yes, I'm really fine. I'm already used to falling over."

Iris-san patted dust off her skirt and stood up.
Indeed, the part she bumped was only slightly reddened. There were not injuries requiring treatment.
"Good to know you are fine... However, I feel that you should take more care not to fall over instead of getting used to it."
Lisa-san sighed and returned to her seat.
"Ahaha... I'll take care from now on."
Iris-san scratched her head in embarrassment then looked around the classroom.
"Then—I'll sit there."
Iris-san pointed at the seat in the last row, closest to the window side.
It was the seat behind Ariella-san's, originally belonging to Shinomiya-sensei —Haruka-san.
Currently, we were occupying the two columns excluding the middle, so I suppose that was the obvious choice.
"Mitsuki-chan, can't I sit there?"
Noticing that I kept staring at her, Iris-san asked uneasily.
"Oh—Not at all, please go ahead."
I frantically nodded and returned to my seat.
Was it because Haruka-san's seat had been filled? The classroom felt subtly refreshing somehow.
Perhaps starting today, Brynhildr Class was going to entire a new era completely.
This crossed my mind as I glanced sideways at Ariella-san who was greeting Iris-san.

Part 6

This report arrived suddenly.
"Mononobe Mitsuki—Your brother is finally located."
While working in the student council office, I was summoned to the principal's office. Principal Charlotte suddenly informed me of the matter.
"Eh... Now, how...?"
Did I mishear? I asked the fairy-like girl.
This was the one thing that had eluded me in the two and a half years after I had arrived in Midgard—even when I made use of my authority as the student council president and captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad.
News of Nii-san, whom NIFL was keeping confined.
Although I was absolutely not giving up, I had already prepared myself to accept that this would take a very long time.
However, if what the principal just said was true—
"Let me say this again. I have located the whereabouts of your brother—Mononobe Yuu."
With a toss of her long blonde hair, the principal spoke leisurely.
"...Where, Nii-san, where is he right now!?"
My mind instantly blanked out. By the time I realized, I was already yelling my question.
"He is in the dark side of NIFL, apparently assigned to a unit whose existence itself is top secret."
After saying that, the principal sighed heavily.
"I never expected... that this matter would involve his son. No wonder things were so tricky."
She sounded like she was monologuing to herself, but in my curiosity, I asked:
"Principal... You know about the person who kept Nii-san hidden?"
"Yes—He has a slight connection to me. A very difficult opponent. Even from this point onwards, taking back your brother will be no easy task, you know?"
The principal gazed at me with a serious expression.
This was the first mentioning of this matter. Having uncovered Nii-san's location, we had finally reached the starting line.
NIFL had covered up the fact that Nii-san was a male D. Even if we were to make a direct request for a transfer, they would probably feign ignorance.

Unless I secured evidence, prepared for negotiations and seized the right opportunity, there was no way for me to take back Nii-san.

"Yes, I understand."

Steeling my resolve to take Nii-san back, I nodded.

"—Such beautiful eyes. Just as I expected, you've grown up to become quite a beauty."

The principal murmured softly, apparently reminiscing about our first encounter. Then she inhaled forcefully.

"Great! For the sake of a noble and beautiful girl, I will fight with all my power!!"

Slam. She brought both palms on her desk and declared.

"...Thank you very much!"

Encouraged by her reassuring declaration, I bowed my head deeply and expressed my gratitude.

Part 7

"Hah—Hah—Hah—"
I breathed regularly while striking the ground with my feet rhythmically.
We were having PE class in an underground sports field today. The temperature and humidity outdoors were too high, unsuitable for athletic activity.
The class involved endurance running. Running laps around the edge of the training site, after a while, I encountered Iris-san, who had fallen behind by one lap.
"Do your best, Iris-san."
I greeted her while overtaking her.
"Ehhh! I got lapped!? Mitsuki-chan, you're so fast..."
Panting irregularly, with sweat dripping off her forehead, Iris-san exclaimed a bit pitifully.
"Please try to pay attention to maintaining your posture even if you are tired. Otherwise, you will add unnecessary strain to your legs."
"O-Okay..."
Unsteadily, Iris-san frantically righted her posture.
"This is my last lap but you still have two, Iris-san. Hang in there."
"I still have two!?"
Leaving the wailing Iris-san behind, I advanced on my own. Next, Firill-san came into view.
"Oh... Mitsuki."
Firill-san noticed and looked at me when I ran alongside her. Despite her slow pace, her face showed a sense of composure unlike Iris-san.
"You are taking it slow today as usual."
"Because... it's tiring after trying too hard."
Firill-san shrugged with an expression of tedium. An indoor person to the very core, Firill had always been like this. During PE classes, she always did the bare minimum.
"Mitsuki—You've been all fired up lately."
"Really?"
I tilted my head slightly because I had not noticed.
"Yes... Did something happy happen?"
Firill-san nodded lightly and gazed at me.
Unsettled with surprise because I had been seen through, I nodded honestly.

"Yes—I have finally discovered the location of what I had been searching for."
"I see... That's wonderful news, Mitsuki."
"—Thank you."
I bowed my head deeply again then quickened my pace.
That was because I was about to smile from happiness due to what she said.
Was I allowed to smile? I was not too sure about that.
Ren-san and Ariella-san suddenly came into view ahead.
"Ariella-san, are you feeling unwell today?"
Running alongside them, I asked.
Ariella-san's athletic ability and stamina were far beyond average.
Normally, she ran even faster than I.
"Oh no, that's not the case. Ren looked like she's having a tough time, so I'm chatting with her on the side to take her mind off things."
Ariella-san was apparently accommodating Ren-san's pace.
"Mm..."
Ren was breathing hard. It did look like she was having a tough time.
"Ren-san, please do not overexert yourself."
"—Mm."
Seeing her nod, I sped up again.
After overtaking them, all I needed to do was race towards the finish line.
But at this moment, I heard footsteps behind me.
"Mitsuki-san, I shan't lose!"
Running alongside me, Lisa-san declared defiantly.
"—I have no intention of losing either."
Seeing Shinomiya-sensei at the finish line, I entered the last spurt.
Indeed, I must win regardless of my opponent. I must become that strong.
For the sake of reaching Nii-san with these hands of mine.
More than anyone, I must become strong.
Putting in every last ounce of strength, I raced forward.
Lisa-san vanished from my view. Her presence felt more and more distant.
"—!"
I held my breath and dashed across the finish line at full speed then collapsed on the ground.
"Huff... Huff... Huff..."
I stared at the ceiling and panted heavily. Next, Lisa-san appeared before my eyes.
"I lost this time."
"No matter how many times... I will never lose."
Hearing my forceful answer, Lisa-san showed slight look of surprise.
"—You have changed."
"Huh?"
What was going on? I looked at Lisa-san in doubt.
However, Lisa-san did not explain in detail. With what appeared to be quite a happy expression, she said:

"I prefer the way you are now."
I was unsure what she meant—Nevertheless, I seemed to have won some kind of approval from Lisa-san.

Part 8

—At long last, this day arrived.
Suppressing my feelings of excitement, I hastily rushed towards the pier.
Honestly, it had been too long. By my power alone, I could not do anything.
The principal, Mica-san, as well as Shinomiya-sensei.
The combined efforts of Midgard's top management had finally bore fruit.
That being said—
"I cannot believe that I had to have a meeting on such an important day..."
Panting, I ran quickly.
I had already missed the time for the ship to reach port. Since I had said I would welcome him personally, no one else had gone to pick him up.
Surely, he must be feeling quite troubled, abandoned at the pier all alone. If I did not hurry over...
My heart raced faster and faster.
When the wind blew, I reached out with my hand to check if my hair had been tousled.
Three years had passed since that time. Although my height had hardly increased, my hair had grown long, greatly altering my image.
—Will he be able to recognize me immediately?
Despite the slight unease in my heart, I mustered the courage to strive forward. However...
"Eh...?"
When I finally hastened to the pier, the one I sought was nowhere to be found.
Only autonomous robots, in charge of moving goods, were there, silently unloading containers.
Surely, he had gone away because no one came to receive him.
The only landmark visible from here was the Academy's tall clock tower. If he had gone in that direction, I would have met him along the way.
Then where on earth had Nii-san gone—?
After pondering briefly, I remembered. It was... a very nostalgic memory for me.
Along the commute from my home to school—there was one part that ran along a river.
Rather than walking on the embankment, he preferred to walk along the shore.

Catching fish in the river and making stones skip on the surface were things he enjoyed.
Although Father and Mother had forbidden us to approach the river and the shore was not easy to walk on, I loved his smiling face—He was the one whom I always chased after.
Hence, assuredly, he...
I went back along the way I had arrived, focusing my attention on the beach of white sand in the direction of the breakwater.
Compared to walking on a paved road, it was more likely that he would be drawn to the seaside's beautiful scenery.
After walking briefly, I heard sounds of a dispute.
One side was a familiar voice.
The other was a male voice I had never heard before in Midgard. A voice I did not recognize.
Throb. My heart began to race violently.
This was only natural. After three years of growth, his voice had changed.
"—I'm not doing that!! What's scary is your imagination!"
"Mononobe the molester! Mononobe the pervert! Huh? Speaking of which, her family name is Mononobe too—"
It seemed like they were having some kind of argument.
Oh well, such a development could not be helped when someone encountered him without knowing the true story. The existence of a male D had not been publicized.
However, putting that aside—
...I clearly wanted to be the first person to see him.
I sighed lightly and called out towards the beach.
"Iris-san, could you please not use other people's family name to scream pervert or molester? Even though I know you are clearly not referring to me, it feels very unpleasant."
Next, their surprised gazes turned towards me.
With him—We made eye contact.
Unlike three years prior, his was a mature face.
But there was no mistake.
Even though he had grown taller and his facial outline had changed slightly—He was still my most beloved.
The one I sought was right before my eyes.
This was the moment I had been looking forward to all along.
My heart pounded uncontrollably, releasing a surge of heat in my body.
Although I really wanted to rush over, in front of Iris-san, I had to hold myself back.
I desperately suppressed the tears of emotion that were about to spill from my eyes.
I descended from the breakwater and walked slowly along the white beach.
Nii-san—
Ah... Finally, finally, we meet.

My body was trembling.
My knees lost strength. I was almost about to collapse.
I wanted to throw myself into his embrace, to lean against him totally.
However—I did not want him to see my weak side. I must not show him that.
He was the one person I had decided never to allow him to shoulder anything.
Meeting him again after three years of separation was the "me" that had grown strong.
Rather than an ending, this was a beginning.
I knew how arduous it was to protect what was in one's possession.
Hence, I shall never lose again.
In front of my most beloved, I must become ever stronger. This was the resolve engraved in my heart—